Spring | 2018

Catalpa

a magazine *of* Southern perspectives

Catalpa Staff

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cover: Lori Kincaid

Why Catalpa?

When choosing a title for our magazine, we wanted a name that would accurately and ethically represent our publication, a graduate magazine geared toward exploring perspectives rooted in the South—particularly Chattanooga. After much debate, we decided to name our new magazine *Catalpa*, the term for a flowering deciduous tree commonly found in the South. The word catalpa is derived from, kutuhlpa, the Muscogee word for "tree" which means "winged head." It has been called Indian bean tree for the long pods it produces and caterpillar tree because it attracts the sphinx moth, whose caterpillars' sometimes ravage the leaves. European settlers, at one time, thought the roots were poisonous and at other times took advantage of the tree's medicinal qualities (from snake bite antidote to a cure for whooping cough). Today, catalpas and their hybrid sisters are primarily used as ornamental trees because of their silvery green leaves and showy, yet delicate flowers. We live in a hybrid place of old worries and new innovations, so the catalpa tree offers a metaphor for the South: deep roots and a diverse, beautiful, troublesome history.

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English Department

From the Editor

This issue almost didn't happen. It wasn't for want of trying, or a lack of support, either. Our staff was limited, our resources, time, and energy stretched thin. Projects and ideas fell through. There were still a number of great essays, photographs, poems and pitches in our inbox, but we weren't sure if it was enough to pull together a second issue. We debated holding off with issue two, waiting until we had a full staff and an excess of submssions to release it. But, we didn't wait. We moved forward, determined and resolute, much like the South.

This issue is our plege to keep ***Catalpa*** alive. The stories that fill the pages of issue two are stories of strong will—people, places, trees, and narratives long forgotten that refuse to fade out of sight.

We're glad to be publishing this issue, and we hope you enjoy it.

Drake Farmer, editor.

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photography | Lori Kincaid

Contributors

Jo Angela Edwins teaches English at Francis Marion University in Florence, SC. She is a native of the Augusta, GA and holds degrees from Augusta University and the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. She has been published in various venues including New South, Calyx, Typishly, Number One, and Naugatuck River Review. She has received poetry prizes from the South Carolina Academy of Authors and Poetry Super Highway. She is a board member for SC Humanities.

Drake Farmer was born and raised among the hills of Eastern Tennessee. He earned a MA in English from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He has written for TREND, a monthly magazine from the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce. If he isn't out walking and looking for birds, he can be found reading the words of others or writing some of his own.

Joanna Gallagher is an east TN native and, though she loves to travel, can't imagine calling anywhere else her home. After stumbling into photography a few years ago, she primarily photographs events, portraits, and her cats. She graduated with an MA in English: Literary Studies from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. You can follow her work at @j.gallagherphotography.com

Anna Humprhies is a native of southeast Alabama, but has spent a third of her life on the Florida Gulf Coast. She is currently an MA English candidate at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga where her research includes the rhetoric of wonder in 19th century natural history writing, an interest that developed over the past decade through her involvement with the Bartram Trail Conference. Three years ago, she traded in spring breakers and snow birds for an old house overlooking the Scenic City where she lives with her husband and a mutt named Digby.

Jake Irwin first fell in love with writing when his fifth-grade teacher taught him that writing was more than a homework assignment. It was about telling a story. From then on, Jake began filling notebooks with character ideas, story concepts, plots, new places, and backstories. After writing several novel-length works as a teenager, he decided to pursue creative writing in college, Jake is a graduate of the The University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, where he earned an MA: Creative Writing.

Jennifer Jones graduated from UTC with a Master's in English: Creative Writing in May 2017. Originally from Bridgeport, Connecticut, she now lives in Chattanooga and works for Pomerance Eye Center as an Ophthalmic Technician. Her one-act play, "The White Rose," has been produced at Dalton Little Theatre and Dalton State College. It was also given a staged reading during Chattanooga Theatre Center's Festival of New Plays in April and May 2017. She has had newspaper articles published in several Connecticut papers, Dalton Daily Citizen, and the Chattanoogan.

Sarah Hedrick-Joyner Sarah works in communications and marketing at her alma mater, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. When she's not at her desk stressing over commas and researching (cyber-stalking) for her next write-up, she prefers to spend her time exploring the Chattanooga area's hiking trails or camping in the mountains with her husband, two toddlers, and most likely one of their three dogs.

Marilyn Kallet is the author of 18 books, including *How Our Bodies Learned*, *The Love That Moves Me* and *Packing Light: New and Selected Poems*, poetry from Black Widow Press. Dr. Kallet is the Nancy Moore Goslee Professor of English at the University of Tennessee. She also leads poetry workshops for VCCA-France, in Auvillar. She has performed her poems on campuses and in theaters across the United States as well as in France and Poland, as a guest of the U.S. Embassy's "America Presents" program. The University of Tennessee lists her as a specialist on poetry's role in times of crisis, as well as on poetry and healing, poetry and humor, poetry and dreams, poetry and Jewish identity.

Lori Kincaid specializes in outdoor photography of the Southern Appalachians, including large format, 35mm, and digital stock photos, and fine prints

Photography | Joanna Gallagher

of scenic mountain landscapes and flora. Lori's photography has been exhibited in regional and national venues, including the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, and featured in numerous regional, national, and international publications. Her credits include some of the country's best known and respected publishers of nature photography, including the National Geographic Society, Audubon Society, and Sierra Club, among others.

Kyle MacKillop is a photographer based out of Chattanooga, Tennessee. A non-native, Kyle moved to the South to pursue a bachelor's degree and has stuck around since. He lives at the foot of Lookout Mountain with his wife and daughter.

R.B. Morris is a poet and songwriter, solo performer, band leader, playwright and actor from Knoxville, Tennessee. His published books of poetry include *Early Fires* (Iris Press), *Keeping the Bees Employed*, and *The Mocking Bird Poems*. His poetry and prose in *Who is this Man*? pay tribute to the late Knoxville artist Ali Akbar, Morris served as the Jack E. Reese Writer-in-Residence at the University of Tennessee from 2004-2008, and was inducted into the East Tennessee Writers Hall of Fame in 2009. In 2016 Morris was named Knoxville's first Poet Laureate. He lives in Knoxville with his wife and daughter.

Laurie Vaughen Laurie Perry Vaughen grew up in Chattanooga and now works as a book editor for a publishing house in Nashville, TN. She is a recent graduate of the MFA in creative writing from the Sewanee School of Letters. She holds a degree in sociology and an MA in English from UTC. She has published two chapbook collections of poetry, *What Our Voices Carry* and *Fine Tuning*. She has been the recipient of the Greensboro Review's Amon Liner Award at UNC Greensboro and the James Dickey Poetry Award through *Lullwater Review* at Emory University in Atlanta. Her performances have been featured at Georgia Center for the Book in Decatur and the 2016 Word of South Festival in Tallahassee.

Gwen Walton was born in Denver, Colorado and received her MA: Arts and Culture in Creative Writing at the University of Denver. She currently works as a Sign Language Interpreter and resides in Chattanooga, Tennessee. This is her first published essay.

To learn more about Catalpa and read past issues, visit catalpamag.com.

ANNA HUMPHRIES

ST. *VINCENT* ISLAND

ALH,

Arrive at Indian Pass Marina 9 am EST. Will bring kayak and lunch. Objective: paddle across pass and hike to redfish pond. Suitable footwear is advised.

TRH

My dad, who goes by T.R., has a reputation in our family for only having an interest in activities that are either completely miserable or potentially life-threatening. For a very long time, I was one of the few people who could not say "no" to his adventure proposals. Even though his idea of fun often ended with me being in tears the entire return-leg of the excursion, looking back, I'm always happy that I joined him. One of his favorite places to go is St. Vincent Island. When I lived in Florida, it was a two-hour drive from my home in Panama City Beach to Indian Pass, a small community on the mainland where we would meet. The trip arrangements, like most of the communication in my family, were always made through email. It would be a day trip for both of us. I would meet him mid-morning so we would have enough time to make the most of the day and still be able to make it home that night.

St. Vincent is a barrier island and wildlife refuge on the Gulf of Mexico in Franklin County, Florida. I'm sure it appeals to my dad because of its remoteness and strange history. Before my mom's death, during the time she was bedridden and ill, my sister, dad, and I all dealt with our grief and anger in our own ways. For my dad, it was making a conscious decision to live life to the fullest, always seeking out the greatest adventure, and appreciating one's history and roots as a way to create a sense of pride and identity. One thing I learned from him is that if you look back far enough, every place has its romantic mysteries. A person doesn't need to travel to the other side of the world to be in an amazing place. For my dad, St. Vincent Island is another world, although it's only a three-hour-away drive away from his house in Alabama.

The island is only accessible by boat, and a shuttle will occasionally ferry passengers across from the Indian Pass Campground and Marina. A few brave tourists will venture across on the shuttle with their mosquito repellent and grocery

Photography |TR Henderson

bags for collecting shells on the beach. I've been to the island with my dad about a dozen times, and we rarely see anyone else there. We park at the marina, launch our kayaks from the beach, and paddle to the island across the swift-moving current that flows through the pass. We head straight across towards the weathered old boathouse and drag our kayaks up on the beach by the dock where the shuttle ties up to let the tourists disembark.

Although covered in dense scrub oak groves, clusters of low-lying palmetto palms, and tall, yellow pines warped by hurricane winds of the past, the state has made it easy to traverse by constructing a grid of shell-paved road beds across the island to help contain controlled burns. We would usually pull our kayaks up onto the beach and hike across the island following one of these roads. This is the easy part.

There is very little talking during these hikes. We don't want to ruin our chances of seeing wildlife. The island and portions of the nearby mainland have been a National Wildlife Refuge since 1968. At the beginning of the 20th century when it was still privately owned, exotic sambar deer were imported from the far East. Their long-living, Asiatic descendants have thrived in the wetland habitat, competing with their much smaller native cousins, the white-tailed deer. These ancient giants also share their home with a large community of feral pigs, called piney wood rooters by the locals, and various endangered species such as bald eagles and loggerhead sea turtles. A small red wolf population was introduced to the island in 1990 as part of a propagation program. I've never seen a red wolf on the island, although I'm sure they have seen me.

The shell-paved road bed ends as we reach the beach on the gulf side. The waves are crashing onto the sand, crushing broken pieces of shell into smaller, smoother bits that give the beach its grainy, peppered texture. I always find more driftwood, dried seaweed, and shells than I can carry back. On one occasion, I found what looked like a severed tentacle–a purplish color and about four feet long. Because of the island's remoteness, there is very little trash. Any man-made debris, such as fishing nets, pieces of construction material, or plastic bottles, is usually deposited on the island by high tides during a tropical storm. We walk along the gulf-side beach for several miles, until we return to the bayside of the island where we left the kayaks. By the time we walk back, our pant legs are soaked up to our knees, there is gritty sand rubbing into blisters on our feet, and our hips hurt with a strange sensation caused by every footstep sinking three inches into the soft sand.

The island's story pre-dates history. Cross-hatched pottery shards made by people of the Weedon Island culture over 7,000 years ago are scattered on the bayside

beach. In the early 1800's, William Augustus Bowles, an infamous figure still celebrated by Fort Walton Beach's annual Billy Bowlegs Festival, headquartered a pirating operation from St. Vincent, running a small fleet of ships manned by separatist Creek Indians and runaway slaves. Bowles and his gang would loot merchant vessels and Spanish ships travelling through the Apalachicola Bay. There are rumors of local beachcombers finding Spanish doubloons in nearby salt marshes and bayous during low tide after storms have passed, and a legend of a Spanish galleon that was dragged by a hurricane across St. George, a neighboring barrier island, leaving behind a trail of silver coins in its path. It's easy to imagine the possibility of stumbling upon treasure washed ashore while walking along one of the island's deserted beaches. These are my dad's favorite stories to tell me as we walk along the beach.

St. Vincent is part of the Florida coastline known as the "Forgotten Coast." This area, reminiscent of "Old Florida," stretches along the panhandle, beginning around touristy Mexico Beach and ending somewhere along the quaint fishing towns of Panacea and Alligator Point. It reminds my dad of his childhood, when a trip to the beach meant staying in mom and pop run hotels, playing goofy golf, and eating at hole-in-the-wall diners–long before MTV's spring break came along. It's the kind of "Old Florida" that Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings wrote about in Cross Creek and The Yearling. He says the only reason people go to places like Destin is to see people and be seen.

The island is just one of the many remarkable sites in the area. Surrounded by cypress swamp floodplains, the alluvial terrain is rich in diverse wildlife. The Apalachicola River flows into the bay slightly northeast of St. Vincent Island, creating a brackish estuary where tupelo trees and oyster reefs flourish. This has created a paradise for sport fishing. It is also the perfect habitat for diverse species of sharks, residing in the murky water, and occasionally venturing up the river. This makes the trip across the pass by kayak back to the mainland even more exciting. I can't help but think about what might be swimming along beside me as I paddle, invisible, only a few feet away.

By the time we have paddled back to the camp site where we parked, after all of the hiking in wet shoes, we are hungry, exhausted, and a little miserable. But soon, I forget the discomfort, and I feel thankful for the adventure and escape into another world, even if it was just for a day.

Photography |TR Henderson

e m p i r e

R.B. Morris

kafka's hunger artist like little jack horner slumped in the corner of
the grand ballroom as endless parades of starlets file past in popping
paparazzi lights channeling the great party to all points of the ravaged
globe while mad robotic bands on spectral stages explode the night,
their mosh pits swelled and surging offering up young virgins for sacrifice
held aloft on fiery hands above the great roiling cacophony
of the age, oblivious to the rabid masses deluging the gates holding
their virtual facsimile to their faces trampling over bodies while they're
being trampled. but don't be afraid, and let us trudge on another way
down roads less taken. our ride will be here soon…

meanwhile back in knoxville where most of this began, where the
mother mountains laid on their backs and whose breasts we now
behold, where the cherokee inked the deal and hank williams and rach-
maninoff bit the bullet and dylan dodged it, the sun is rising on aphro-
dite's sly smile as she strolls down the street at dawn after a
night of no sleep. and please, another round of whatever they're
having. and here's to the new manana, and I'll see you in the
garden in the wasteland where we'll put our shoulders to the big
wheel again. another working day. and by the way, the empire has
fallen. long live the empire.

Photography |Sarah Joyner

Sarah Hedrick Joyner

Buried *Beneath*

My family has called this little patch of land in Northwest Georgia home for generations. Up the ridge sits the family cemetery with its gravestones half-sunk in the ground, rotten fences scaring intruders, and breathtaking views of the valley below. The only legible stone has 1897 and a forgotten name etched upon its face.

My great-grandparents, Elmer and Bernice, had a distinct memory of the Great Depression. They understood what it was to struggle, they were distrustful of banks, and they were willing to cut costs, no matter the results, to provide for their families.

Elmer owned two dump trucks. He collected the community's trash and, to save money, avoided the landfill's fees by opting to dump the contents of his trucks onto the family land. He cut a trail to the far end of the property where it met the railway tracks and began to dump. The trail grew shorter as the dump crept slowly towards their house.

My mother was raised in a small house on the property. She said an entire section of their land was devoted to the skeletons of cars. She and her younger brothers turned that wasteland into their

playground, but only by day. After the sun set, the field of gnarled trees, ripped tires, and metal skeletons grew ominous in their imagination. Ghosts came to life in the rusted vehicles and claimed the wasteland for their own.

As they grew older, my mother's brothers sliced out a piece of the property for their own, paying their grandfather the measly payment he requested, hauling off metal skeletal remains to haunt some other piece of land, and digging pits to toss their mounds of ripped tires into before covering with a thin layer of dirt. "There's a spot off to the side of my house that has a bit of a bounce to it," my uncle jokingly tells friends sometimes. He is amused to find that he has his own personal trampoline built into his front yard. Although you can no longer see the pit of tires, they add a bounce to your step as you round the corner to his side door.

As a child, I was disgusted by what I considered to be a terrible case of hoarding on my great-grandparent's part. But as fate would have it, I have found myself living on the land that is littered with their frugality. On the occasional days when I leave my dog to wander our property unattended, I come home to piles of objects barely distinguishable from one another: rusted cans of rotted food, patches of rugged rubber, metal signs riddled with bullet holes. Craters litter my yard where she excitedly uncovered her treasure. Days such as these are a reminder of what is beneath. What is covered with dirt and grass and the occasional spring bulb coming to bloom; what resides beneath the surface, unseen, speaks of a family's past, and the persevering character of nature to conquer and adapt.

Twelve miles northeast of this oddly entrancing landscape lies Chattanooga. This mid-sized industrial city in Tennessee struggled to contain its pollution in the middle of the twentieth century. The infamous story goes that as "Chattanooga choked on its own prosperity," Walter Cronkite proclaimed on national television that the city was officially deemed "the dirtiest city in America" in 1969. Naturally, city planners and councilmen jumped to action, cleaning the air and setting down plans to revitalize the dirty downtown center. One sustainable endeavor included creating a park where an industrial site used to be. What is now Renaissance Park was once a dumping ground for waste as well as the final chapter in a series of toxin bearing streams, all joining here after their winding routes through the northern end of the city and surrounding neighborhoods. When the park was designed, intriguing focal points emerged, including a wetland created to purify the streams feeding into the Tennessee River. Their final paths were forced through a labyrinth of native plants that filtered out toxins before the streams joined the river. As for the scraps of industrialism, instead of hauling them off to landfills outside of the city, they were piled high and covered in dirt and grass. This heaping pile of trash now resembles geometric shapes similar to the ancient tombs of the Egyptians. Students enjoy its slope on snow days, and families rarely stop to consider the biological makeup of the oddly shaped hill as they slide down its side on cardboard boxes.

Sitting atop this pretty pile of trash, one's imagination is far removed from what lies beneath, the by-product of an appliance factory buried below layers of clay and soil. The oddly shaped hills and recovered wetland are littered with wildflowers and cattails, replacing the rusted scraps and poisoned dirt. In comparison to my family's land, this landscape is a far better example of how to continue living in an environment where the scraps of our past are maintained in harmony with nature.

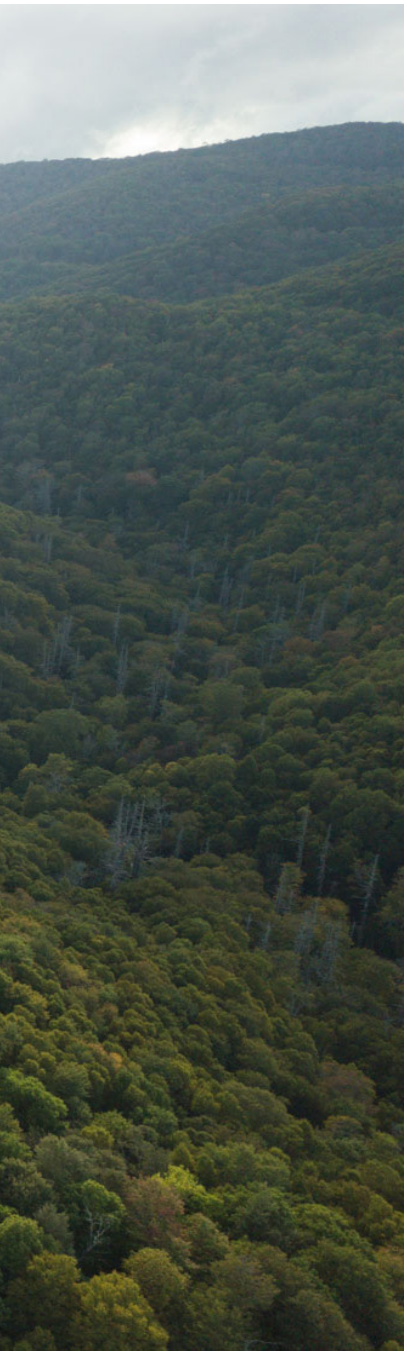
Along the Blue Ridge Parkway

PHOTO ESSAY

BY KYLE MACKILLOP

To drive along the historic Blue Ridge Parkway is to encounter a road that demands attention. Behind the wheel, a driver's eyes must stay glued to the winding, two lane road for fear of hairpin turns and switch-backs. A passenger must contemplate the mystery of these ancient Appalachian hills.

Kyle's photographs offer a stuning glimpse of what, exactly, this tract of southern road has to offer.



Mostly the Swerving

Jo Angela Edwins

Old Lumber Mill Road is indeed old, sinking
at the edges like an old man's jaws,
its two lanes shoulderless, bordered by swamp,
except for small stretches that showcase
on one side brick houses and clover fields,
on the other a trailer park, a burned-out church.

The morning the mother's car tumbled
across it like a fallen leaf,
it was cold, the day after Halloween,
the day after the day of the dead.
Neither the mother nor her child,
asleep and buckled in back,
knew what was coming. Which goes without saying.
None of us know, making life the terrible
bliss that it is. The sun gleamed exactly
the same just before as it did
afterwards. What surprises us
when everything changes is that nothing does.
We lie still as gray bones in the woods,
feeling earth cycle like a paddlewheel beneath us.
We can do nothing but lie.

Perhaps the woman and her child live.
Perhaps they don't.

Someone at the scene recalls out loud
his grandfather's advice:
whatever it is, collide with it.
It's mostly the swerving that kills us.

GWEN WALTON

America *on* Loop

I go kayaking with my husband on an early summer day in Lake Ocoee on the western edge of the Chattahoochee National Forest. The Chattahoochee Forest begins in Northern Georgia and as it sprawls northeast it butts against the Nantahala National Forest. Further north it becomes the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It is our first trip out since acquiring the kayaks and, not the first, but certainly an early step toward the life that we fantasized for ourselves here in southeast Tennessee. We moved here last fall from Denver, imagining a greener, warmer and wetter existence. Also, cheaper. Everyone had suddenly found out about Denver, the magnificent power of the Rockies, and their ability to transfix you on a weekday. Or maybe it was just legal marijuana. Either way, in just a few years, hordes of folks moved to my hometown and drove up living costs.

It was supposed to be a great adventure and a period of rapid growth. Two far-left liberal atheists exploring the south and confronting the county's polarization crisis head-on. We were so proud of ourselves. But my winter was bleak. Jeremy worked nights, and I was lonely. I had encouraged him to take a bartending job. I would write and paint. I had thought that the isolation, away from old distractions, was a highway to creativity. But most nights I napped and watched T.V. and drank wine or poorly made cocktails. My paints collected dust; my ideas flashed un-plucked. In a few short months I grew angry with Jeremy. I would wake up in a sleepy rage scrolling the list of offenses: not saving money, not cleaning the toilet, being effusive over his friends but aloof with me, saying things to me like "I don't know what to say." I couldn't figure if any of it was fair. I was drifting. Then we would go outside.

And here we are now, circling the dusty parking lot trying to figure if we can fit our 4 Runner

between the rows of pickups attached to boat trailers. We pack the kayaks and head out of the narrow finger toward the lake. There is no consistent shore and the crawling foliage, branches from paw-paws, river birch, sumac and other trees I cannot yet name, reach low over the water. I'm still getting used to all the deciduous trees out here. I never knew that to call something an oak tree is, in fact, wildly general, that there is a litany of oak varietals. But now I can pick out the rounded corners of their leaves, like the bubble letters of greenery (unless it's a red oak!). Maple leaves are easy to spot; I just conjure an image of the Canadian flag. Hickory leaves are harder, but the deep brown nuts are a give-away. Sumacs have the long stems with a ladder of narrow leaves on both sides and seem bushier than they do sturdy or stout. Rhododendrons look downright tropical with their dark glossy leaves and sycamore trunks look sick. My self-education lacks organization. And no matter how many times I look it up and try to commit it to memory, almost all ground verdure looks like poison ivy to me.

And as we paddle out into the open we cross a threshold. I know it. Jeremy knows it. He looks back at me and smiles under his wide brimmed sun hat, and we find ourselves deliciously in sync. The kind of synchronicity that becomes a goal in a marriage, sought out and strategized, discussed. And as with all things so indescribable (happiness, desire, lightness), the harder I sought, the farther away I became. But here, we scull upon it.

Ocoee Lake looks like a tall inkblot on a map, oblong with dozens of craggy fingers. We look out at the light rippling water with green hills on all sides, pick an arbitrary direction and move. These hills look like they have blankets laid over them. I see a body hiding underneath one: the hump of an elbow, the dip behind a neck. I think of my paint palette and all the shades of green I know: sap, cadmium, Prussian, olive, viridian. They're all here, even patches of chartreuse near the water. Jeremy's voice carries to me easily as we head to a jetty with a campsite we want to inspect. We reach it eventually but not before stopping to dangle our feet in the water and open a beer. Jeremy slides down in his seat and rests his head, pulling a hat over his eyes. The sky is clear and the sun feels hot. The wake from motor boats pulling screaming children on tubes send me in slow circles, and I maneuver into them, oddly not annoyed. We talk. We decide to find this campsite sometime later and return with friends, then head toward another rock covered jetty. We shore the kayaks and Jeremy immediately runs up the head-high dirt bank into the trees. He throws down his shoes so I can make the trek myself; my flip-flops gave out almost immediately after getting out of the car. We weave around a few trees, looking up and feeling dizzy. There isn't the usual tangle of low growth; the ground is dusty and sparse. We marvel at the sap on a short-leafed pine tree, considering how the sugary clod is a scab. This tree was wounded. This tree is healing.

On another day, I would feel pressed to cover some distance, to optimize this outing. I might calculate mileage and calories consumed from those beers. Instead we scoot back down and swim with languid strokes and dips in the warm tea water.

As we pull the boats back out, Jeremy starts taking photos of me. I swing the paddle over my shoulders and pose for him. I almost believe those pictures might turn out. My self-loathing has become comical. Sitcom funny, where defining flaws make for zany anecdotes and not accidental deaths or other tragedy. I'm a caricature. It's the best outcome I can hope for. To me, trying to love yourself is like trying to kiss yourself, or move a pencil with your mind, an impossible mental contortion that people keep glibly instructing me to do. It's like in yoga class when your instructor says, "Breath into the tips of your toes." Look lady, I'll pretend to do that, but you know that's pure nonsense, right? Instead, I've learned to try and take care of myself. That's real. Here's to the good fight.

Unlike me, Jeremy doesn't much fight with himself. I'm watching him, and he is beautiful bent over his kayak. He's rakish and slays. A camera pointed at him doesn't frighten him. Nor do the snakes or the snapping turtles on the hunt for wiggly toes. When he does fight, he fights authority and stupidity and bros. We push off the shore.

My thoughts are lexical. Whole sentences roil in my head in a perpetual coil. This day is making a case (a complex visceral argument) and thanking me for finally looking, but the best thing the crazy person I imagine in my brain can come up with is, "Damn, I feel happy." Of course, self-consciousness is a blight on joy. It chases its object back into the shadows. The lightness I feel begins to thicken. Jeremy is ahead of me, and to spare him, to mitigate my loss, I vow not to announce my assessment. I swallow the urge to exit this experience by narrating it. I'll probably prattle and post later, but for now, I'll stay in. Jeremy's curiosity is steering, and now he is changing course because he's seen something he wants to investigate.

He pulls up to an abandoned dock that is weathered and making a slow collapse into the lake. He explains

Photography | Kyle Mackillop

to me how in Michigan, where he is from, many of the docks are floating because the lakes freeze over during the winter. He recently quit his job at the bar, found a job building docks, and goes swimming every day. We fantasize about having a lake house. He describes the cumaru steps he would build up the hill. I would hang bird feeders. He tells me about the baby turtle that swam up to him at work and the house of a childhood friend where he would go to catch frogs and pick wild blackberries for his grandmother, which she would use to make him a milkshake. I think about loss and purpose and watch my toes catching a prism of sunbeams under the surface of the water. *Nothing matters!* I think. I like this thought. It always hugs me when I have it, then slips away. I would have trouble explaining this to Jeremy. He'd get lost in the abstraction and would ask me what "existential" means again. The irony is that he lives it; Jeremy doesn't need purpose or path, doesn't encounter the contradictions of picking a particular answer to "Why?" And he's never had problems tossing things off the boat if necessary. I sometimes think I married a muse.

We pop into another small cove and drift apart as the sun gets low. The big boats are all gone, or heading back in, and the quiet becomes our third. We make one final stop on another small shore to skip rocks. Jeremy hugs me and asks if I'm having a good day. I want to tell him, The best! And you? How do you feel? What are you thinking? But I don't. I smile at him and hand him a flat stone–which turns out to be caked mud–and he seems satisfied.

When we finally pull back into the launch area, the fishing boats are headed out. We drag the kayaks through the riverbed and into the grass while another family is hitching their boat back up to their trailer and struggling to get it aligned. Jeremy jumps in to help, and I watch a school of young Bluegills off the dock with the family's two young and shirtless sons. Really, I am watching the fish (unable to name them until a fisherman loading a pizza box onto his pontoon tells me), and the boys are chucking rocks into the water screaming "In your face!" So carefree. So murderous! The patriarch of the crew stands back on the pavement, also shirtless and slouching over a huge rolling belly with a bizarrely tranquil baby in arm.

We load the kayaks without urgency and drive away with the windows down. Jeremy hooks up his iPod, and although it is unsaid, plays a track meant to please me. Jeremy has an impressive music collection acquired through pirating and a blanket style approach to selection. We were driving to dinner once back in Denver and a track of Alan Ginsberg reading his poem "America" came on. I made him stop the car. On the way back from the lake, he plays it for me on loop. He doesn't get it. He's said to me again and again he can't

read poetry. Whatever he thinks about the poems I've written for him, I have no idea. My expressions of love lost in translation. But he enjoys this track too, although he can't articulate why. Somewhere he feels what I am thinking. The road snakes through homes and farms.

In a last-minute decision, we make a U-turn and pull into a roadside bar name Dumpy's. The bar is one large pole barn fortified by a mishmash of lumber and corrugated steel and barrels. Out back is a volleyball court and an aging deck and more idle building materials and some chain link fence. Colored spotlights hang from the ceiling. The hill behind shoots up maybe 50 feet at a near 90 degree angle and tree roots and ivies look sewn into the red mud wall. We have a beer and chat with a local who works as a river rapids guide. Maybe twenty people lounge at the bar or on the downed logs used for seating. A woman in a body length t-shirt plays pool. Maybe she's wearing shorts; maybe not. The place satisfies some of my expectations of a country dive–it's called Dumpy's–but it was far from the drain trap that I hoped and feared it would be. The rapids guide defends Dumpy's; the place is endeared. Our lingering mood lifts, and we leave as the five-piece rock band starts to drag equipment to the stage and plug it all in. Think beards like ZZ Top.

The dark clouds roll in almost the exact same time the sun touches the tops of the Cumberland Mountains making the shift from day to night dramatic. The storm that had been promised on the weather report (which almost kept us at home) finally comes in and ominous flashes lay ahead. Jeremy puts the track back on, one more time before we turn the radio down low for the remainder of the journey home.

* * *

There they are, driving west on Highway 64 back to Chattanooga with two plastic sails perched on top of their car in an approaching storm.

I'm sick of your insane demands.

There she is, listening to the rain drum, the poem play, a negotiation with country and self, a beautiful circle. It could have been written yesterday, she thinks. As the car whips in a wind gust, she is resisting the urge to calibrate her connection with him and rubs her hand in his thick hair.

... after all it is you and I who are perfect not the next world.

Your machinery is too much for me.

There he is, alert, charged with returning them home safely. A perfect day has a safe home in him. It won't be manhandled too much. He wonders if he's satisfied her.

You made me want to be a saint.

There must be some other way to settle this argument.

He lights his last cigarette.

Photography | Kyle Mackillop

Jennifer Jones

Leroy Sullivan: Voice of the *Forgotten*

It is October 1940. Germany is heavily engaged in the Battle of Britain, Charlie Chaplin has just released his film, *The Great Dictator*, and Leroy "Sully" Sullivan restlessly taps his pencil on his desk while he gazes out the window of his University of Chattanooga classroom. Sully is the freshman class Vice President, makes good grades, and enjoys popularity among his many friends, but his thoughts are far from school and Chattanooga. The world is at war, and Sully is ready to join. Before the year is over, Sully will leave his hometown and studies to enlist with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

As a fighter pilot, Sully will participate in campaigns in England, South Africa, Sudan, and Egypt. He will rise to the rank of Flight Lieutenant and will become a commanding officer of his squadron in Africa. Sully will live his dream, but it will be short-lived. He will die in action when his plane malfunctions on takeoff in 1943. And like many of his American comrades, he will be buried in England in the Canadian section of a military cemetery.

Seventy-five years later, Sully's remains are still buried in the grave of a foreign country, but his written story and legacy are preserved in his hometown through the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga's special collections. Sully's archived writings consist of three diaries he kept during his time in service along with sixteen letters he wrote to his friend, Grady Long.

Sully's writings reveal a young man whose life and legacy are forever linked to this nation's past, but like so many others of that time, one whose story had become buried in the annals of history—dusty and forgotten like their graves overseas. The preservation of individual accounts gives us an important connection to the past. Diaries and letters link us to historical insights with a deeper understanding of events that too often become glossed over in textbooks. They help move us forward with a better appreciation for how we got to this point in our Nation's growth and where we are going. In textbooks, the past is recorded in terms of the big events—dates, names, and what happened where, when, and why. Diaries and letters give us a personal look into those events and in some

cases, can supersede the authority of what is written in textbooks. In Sully's case, the contents of his writings add to the narrative of WWII by providing a voice for a little-known aspect of America's involvement—the thousands of Americans who volunteered to fight with Canada before the U.S. entered the war and if killed, were buried as foreigners on foreign soil.

...

On a balmy April day in 1941, while Sully was stationed in Canada training to become a fighter pilot, he met his mother for a visit in Detroit. They frequented coffee shops in the morning, walked along the waterfront, and talked into the night. Mrs. Sullivan rode an escalator for the first time and bought a fancy new hat in an upscale shop. A hat, which, Sully wrote, she "looked wonderful" in. When their visit had come to an end, Sully lamented her departure: "Feeling like hell once leaving mom, and I know how she feels - I love her more than anything in world." While reading Sully's diaries and letters, it was clear that Sully's need to live the adventurous life he wanted versus his concern for his mother should she be left alone, weighed on his mind—a conflict that remains a constant throughout his writings.

Once overseas, Sully's writings were more reflective, but also filled with the daily antics of young soldiers. On the cusp of manhood, Sully pondered the meanings of religion and literature but also enjoyed the social outings that included drink and women. He found no shortage of opportunities to get lost in the escapades of soldiers letting off steam: putting a praying mantis in a comrade's bed or "recovering two ties from a party a few nights ago." During one seemingly long bout of downtime and boredom, Sully wrote that he and the boys:

"Found a shot-gun and cartridges, took the pellets out of all (or at least we thought all) the shells and proceeded to fire them off in various peoples' rooms. Consequently, we have a couple of big gaping holes in the ceilings, due, no doubt, to some slight miscalculation!"

With a borrowed typewriter, a cigar, and a long whiskey in hand, Sully wrote to Grady Long about his frequent encounters with women: "No lie, Grady, the women over here go for my Mom's fair-haired boy in a large way. Not bragging at all. In some instances it gets me in a few mix-ups, but I suppose I can chalk it all up as experience."

In his quiet time, Sully acquired an interest in poetry after reading a volume of poems by A. E. Houseman, sent to him by Long. Sully found a like-mindedness with the poet and decided to try his hand at writing poems himself. He wrote to Long, "Here I am, nineteen years of age and full of wind and piss attempting to write poetry."

Apart from the antics, girls, and musings on poetry, Sully's days were filled with the serious work of campaigns, classes, training, and flying fighter bombers such as the North American Harvard. He occasionally wrote of an airplane mishap, or near-miss ,which he called a "shaky do." In an October 17, 1941 entry, he wrote of one such shaky do. While he and his comrade were doing spins at 7,000 feet, Sully was in the back of the plane, "under hood." The motor cut at 5,000 feet. They would have to make a forced landing. At 3,000 feet, the plane caught fire and Sully, as ordered, jumped. The fire went out and his comrade successfully landed the plane. Sully got away with a sprained ankle. "I am the first man to get out of the back end of a Harvard alive," he wrote.

Shortly after that entry, the diary page marked November seventh was left empty in 1941. In 1943, someone had recorded on that page that Sully had been killed in an aircraft accident at Martlesham Heath Airdrome, near Ipswich, Suffolk, England. On the page marked November eleventh, an entry was made stating Sully was buried at Brookwood Cemetery, near London in the Canadian section. The diary then picks back up on November 21, 1941 with Sully's entries and continues on.

I work for an ophthalmology practice in Chattanooga. Daily, we see parades of wheelchairs, walkers, and canes guided by white-haired, elderly folks moving slowly around the lobby and corridors. At the time I read his diary, I had calculated that Sully would be ninety-four years old if he were alive, and so I watched for patients of that age to come through our doors in hopes that someone might have known him. It was surprisingly easy. On my second day of seeking out and questioning the eldest of our patients, a ninety-four-year-old woman, Hilda Crabtree, came in for her eye examination. She was alert and sprightly, well-dressed in slacks and a blouse and had impeccably-styled brown hair. I had made a point to be the one who would do her tests before she saw the doctor, and once I had her captive the interview began. After establishing that she had grown up in Chattanooga and had attended Chattanooga City School, I asked if she remembered Leroy Sullivan.

"Oh yes! He went to the war," she said. Then in a quieter voice, "He was killed there. I could never understand

why he went to Canada."

She remembered him. She remembered him well. I asked if she could tell me more. She sat back in her chair, crossed her legs to get comfortable, and folded her arms on her lap.

"He was good looking, outgoing, and well liked," she said. "He was always interested in the ROTC."

I asked about his family: "His mother raised him by herself and his father had died when he was very young. He was an only child."

Ms. Crabtree provided bits and pieces to Sully's story that I could not find elsewhere. She answered the question that had been churning in my mind and confirmed what I had feared—he was his mother's only child. In turn, I told her about Sully's diaries and letters, and what I had learned about why he joined the RCAF—that in the U.S. two years of college was required to qualify for pilot training. Sully could not wait, so he headed to Canada where there was no like prerequisite.

Photograph courtesy of UTC archives

As I talked to Ms. Crabtree, I got the sense that Sully's story moved her, meant something to her. I was telling her things she didn't know about an old friend whom she hadn't seen in over seventy years but had never forgotten. I wanted to reach out and touch her arm, touch this person, this living connection to someone whose life and legacy are so much a part of our nation's history, as though doing so would connect me, too. Like diaries and letters, the memories of our senior citizens are valuable treasures. They can help fill the holes and gaps in the stories of the past, to be carried on into the future.

In his diaries and letters, Sully predicted his death and that he would remain overseas. In a letter to Long dated February 8, 1942, he said that he "does not expect to be back, try to keep Mother's spirits on an even keel," then, in an undated poem:

Belief

Midst azure blue of cloudless sky

Our man-made wings upward soar;

To give us strength to do or die-

Perhaps to live for evermore.

On foreign soil I'll come to rest;

From a flaming sky that's shocked to see

Her loyal sons turn to the West,

And what yet remains of me.

But will it not to be in vain-

This test of courageous youth and spirits,

Long centuries ofter we have lain

Our debt is paid and God remits.

Although Sully's grave lies forgotten along with thousands of other American soldiers buried overseas, his diaries and letters give us and future generations a look into the daily life of a WWII fighter pilot as a comrade, student, poet, lover, dreamer, and son—like his diary, interrupted by the entry of his death, his story continues on.

PROFILE:
ANNA HUMPHRIES
The *Crea*tures Next Door

My husband and I bought a house last February on Missionary Ridge, a historic neighborhood in Chattanooga. The first week after moving in, we found a few housewarming gifts left on the porch from neighbors and were offered the usual invitations of "come over for a beer sometime." One night we came home and found a basket by the back door with homemade brownies and an envelope. My husband handed me the envelope to open. I was expecting the normal, cheerfully printed "Welcome" greeting card, with flowers on the front and a poem inside about the difference between a house and a home. I opened the envelope and pulled out the card, surprised to see a pen and ink macabre sketch on the front that looks like an illustration from a children's book, but much more sinister. It was an illustration from Edward Gorey's The Glorious Nosebleed. The inscription inside welcomed us to the neighborhood. It was signed by Tim Reed and Jeanie Holland.

Tim and Jeanie are my nextdoor neighbors. Their house was one of the first in the neighborhood, originally a farmhouse built not too long after the Civil War. Walking into their house is like stepping into a folk art museum. There are perfectly curated vignettes everywhere. Tim and Jeanie are both artists themselves, but most of what they have displayed was given to them by friends they've met through the years at festivals.. In the entryway, Tim has a cabinet full of vintage toys, mostly dolls. There are various doll parts and things like vintage clapping monkeys, magic 8 balls, wind up animals, a few beanie babies, stuffed Simpson's characters, R2D2, and various action figures. Tim reaches in and pulls out a dinosaur head puppet and yells at Jeanie, "Hey look! We already had one of these!" Jeanie has a "Dia de los Muertos" vignette in the living room with sugar skulls, skull candle holders, a skeleton family having dinner in a doll house, and a clay skeleton bride and groom set that she has made. Tim and Jeanie are self-employed and travel to regional art shows and festivals selling their pieces. In fact, that's how they met.

Tim Reed grew up in Tuscaloosa Alabama. Tuscaloosa isn't a huge town. There wasn't much going on in the late 60's besides the university. After high school, Tim found odd jobs working in kitchens and music stores. Tim is a creative at heart, and found like company with a group of friends in

Fried Chicken [Tim Reed, 2014]

Sometimes I Just Have to Touch a Dog [Jeanie Holland, 2017]

the early 70's who he says "were caught between the Hippie movement and Punks." They were fascinated with the concept of surrealism, and soon formed an artist troupe called the Raudelunas. The Raudelunas had approximately 20 members mostly music students at University of Alabama. The group would often meet in one of the university's band rooms, with full access to the equipment and the instruments. Tim played the flute in middle and high school and had the ability to be able to pick up various instruments and play them. The Raudelunas looked for opportunities to perform in the community, and as a way to draw interest to their music, they created bizarre variety skits inspired by Vaudeville shows, a theatrical genre of variety entertainment. Tim developed an alter-ego named Fred Lane. Fred was a singer in the band and the emcee of the shows. He was tasked with telling bad jokes, creating voice-overs, and playing recorded audience applauses during the performances.

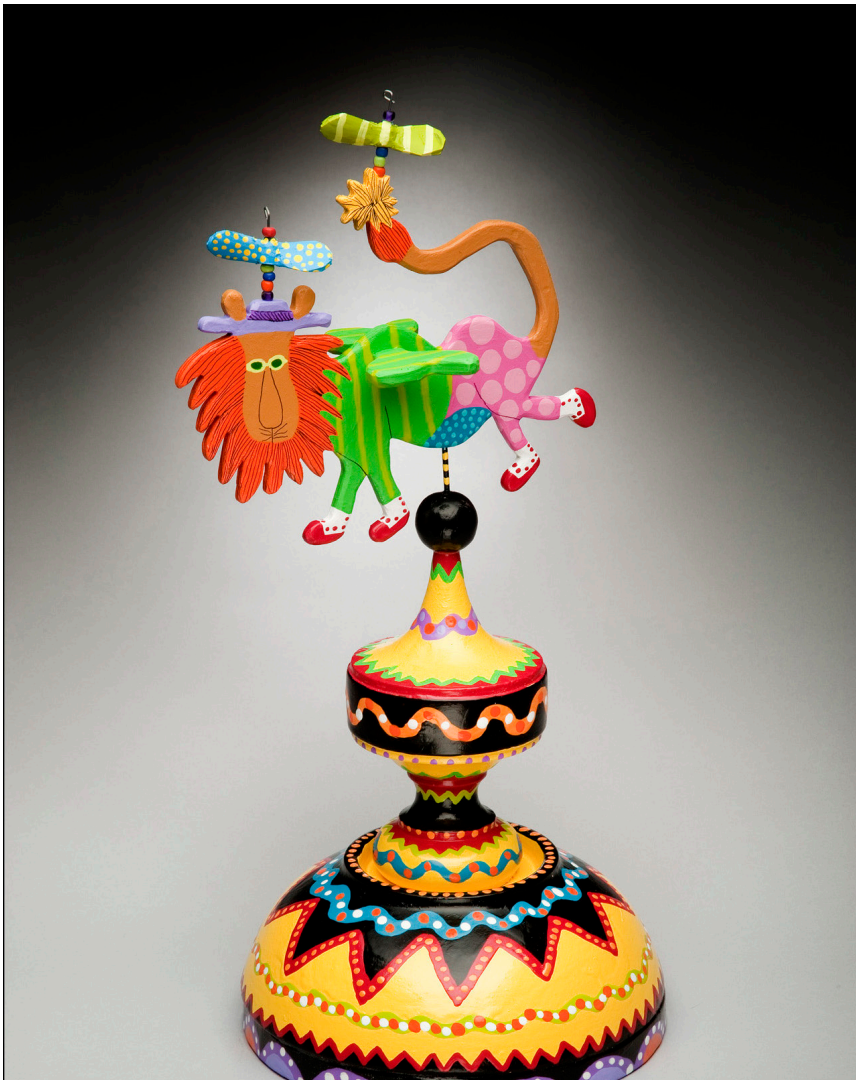
Tim's inspiration comes from his environment. Childhood memories of cartoons and old movies, as well as his observation of the bizarre things people say and do, spur his creativity. Tim had other artistic endeavors other than music and variety shows. He had been collecting found objects, painting and piecing them together, and adding in some decoupage. In 1981, he entered his work in an exhibition at the Kentuck Art Center called "Wind Toys, Weathervanes, and Whirligigs." He had constructed a whirligig out of an old fan. He began making whirligigs embellished with characters he invented. One such character was named "Reet Sputz" and was fashioned after Ted Bowen's description of the imaginary friend he had when he was 4. Tim incorporates kinetic movable parts into all of his pieces, even smaller character ornaments. All of Tim's "creatchers" have names fashioned out of plays on words as well as their own stories.

Tim was at an Art show in 1997 when he met Jeanie Holland. Jeanie is a potter, and had been placed in a booth beside Tim's. Jeanie said she met Tim when she turned around and he was standing at the back of her booth eating her potato chips. She said sometimes she would look over and he would be napping while people were walking in and out of his booth. She gave Tim the side-eye when she told me that she thoroughly vetted him before they started dating. Tim's sense of humor was the first thing Jeanie noticed. "He was always making people in his booth laugh," she says. He would speak to everyone who came by and would share the stories behind all of his "creatchers."

Jeanie Holland is from the Carolinas. She grew up travelling between Charlotte and coastal South Carolina. She comes from what she describes as a family of "linear thinkers" and is the only creative out of the bunch. "I had to be very serious about being responsible and paying my bills on time to justify being an artist to my family," she says. She thinks that's one reason why she and Tim are such a good match. They are both creatives, but Tim has more freedom to escape from reality because Jeanie stays grounded and manages the business aspect.

Jeanie has always loved stories. Her family never had a television, but relied on storytelling for entertainment. Usually the stories were overheard from her room when the grown-ups were talking at night about crazy family members or the town drunk, but she was also told a lot of stories by her Gullah babysitter, Hattie, who was also a healer. Hattie would threaten Jeanie and her sister with the "Hootie" who would come and get them in their sleep if they weren't good. Jeanie picked up the Gullah language from Hattie, but was chastised by her parents if she was heard speaking it at home. As she's telling me about the Hootie myth, she points over to an ominous clay figure on the wall that reminds me of

Image: Giant Blue Duck [Jeanie Holland, 2017]



an evil gingerbread man cookie. "Actually… that's a Hootie I made based on Hattie's description," she says.

Jeanie took a ceramics class in high school and fell in love with the medium. She planned to attend a ceramics program at college in 1986, but her life took another route and she worked mostly retail jobs in Charlotte. She eventually became an "Alternative Music Specialist" at a family-owned company called Record Bar. She was transferred to the company's Atlanta location in 1989. Jeanie had not touched pottery since high school. She was feeling tired of the retail business, decided to do something for herself, and signed up for a pottery class. She attended pottery classes at Callanwold Fine Art Center in Atlanta for 6 to 8 months before going through their certification program to become an instructor herself. She left her job at the music store in 1991 in order to pursue art full-time. She continued teaching at the Callanwold Center for 15 years and also taught a class at the Abernathy Art Center.

Jeanie uses a hand building technique for the clay, and a low-fire electric firing method. She does not throw pottery on a wheel. Her first pieces were series of pots that she would carve stories and phrases into. Tim and Jeanie moved to Chattanooga in 2004. She was invited to attend a weekly hooked rug meeting in the neighborhood. She decided that she loved the primitive, folkish designs of the rugs almost as much as she loved pottery. She decided to incorporate the rug's pieces into her art medium by using them as the backdrops for shadow boxes. Jeanie mounts clay figures, which are often animals, into the shadow boxes made from cigar boxes, drawers, or handmade frames. In Jeanie's artist statement, she says "The hooking itself creates a texture which stands up well to the clay." She is starting to explore ways to incorporate kinetics into her art. She and Tim often discuss ideas for how she can do this. Her pieces have a folk art feel to them. They are based on primitive children's toys and are designed to feel like a moment taken from a story.

Tim and Jeanie now travel around to festivals and shows together. They have both done commissioned pieces on occasion, but mostly the ideas are their own visions. When I asked how they reconcile the pressure to produce pieces for generating income that they rely on with staying true to their own visions, Jeanie's response revealed what she thinks art is, and why she really enjoyed teaching. She believes art is fun, that it "grants permission to approach life from a different angle," and can be a tool for working out problems and emotions. She believes everyone has something artistic about them, and that creating art is satisfying because a student makes something that is "their own." She and Tim both create pieces at various price points, not only to be able to sell more at festivals, but in order to make art accessible to everyone. Jeanie has smaller clay pieces that are magnets, and Tim has a series of "creachter" ornaments that sell at a lower price point than his larger, table top whirligigs.

These days when they aren't firing clay or painting at home on the ridge, Tim Reed and Jeanie Holland can be found at various regional festivals or the Chattanooga Market.

Some of their work is displayed on their Facebook page, Odd-creatchter.

Image: Dandy Lion [Tim Reed, 2014]

LAURIE VAUGHEN

We Live Close to Our *Stories*

When life gets too structured I like to travel and explore with no agenda or research, to find what is there to find. As I've gotten older I am not a collector of postcards, but roam the back alley for texture or sit in a park and watch it become a cinema. It is a hot July day when I arrive in Birmingham, Alabama, slightly more than two hours from my home in Tennessee.

I take the second exit into downtown. One that does not have a cluster of drought-tolerant shrubs as gateway, or any brands beckoning their low-rent concierge. There's nothing much as I put on the brakes, only the familiar path of dark concrete winding in a bell curve toward near-burnt grass. Eventually I see one modest house near the edge, the sign of old abandonments the interstate brought to every Southern town. A block or two further and there are other remnants of a neighborhood.

And then the city opens up to me, with its skyline industry graying in the distance, and those immediate bright blooms of crepe myrtles planted with intentionality. They must be a better price point than an actual tree. I pull in a lot gridded like a city map with sneeze weed and flea bane struggling in the asphalt cracks. Next door a church gleams. The neon corner sign of the 16th Street Baptist Church catches my eye as vintage artifact. Slowly, details are disappearing from our first- and second-ring neighborhoods. Slowly, towns' personality becomes a blank stare with fewer neon winks.

Before the narrative unraveled for me from history, I was initially taken in by the church architecture. Perhaps others have this reaction with any holy place, and maybe that is the power of good design. This church came with a trinity of domes. I turn around to take in the view of the park across the corner, a context I had driven past to find parking. Across the grassy lawn and shade were glimpses of public art, scattered about as if children had left toys strewn in a yard. It's summer after all.

I walk closer to explore the church's imagery where familiar narratives are framed in stained glass. Sheep, angels, a pastoral scene. I head up the front steps. An older couple, seemingly reluctant

Photography| Laurie Vaughen

to take on the climb, asks me to let them know if the church is open today for viewing. Seems they've just arrived too and are from somewhere further South, Montgomery. I am greeted at the landing with a series of locked doors and spare them the pointless sojourn. They find for us all a workaround, the basement door as the public threshold. If I was mindful, this would have been foreshadowing. We go in together to a large room where the story of 1965 seems on one hand incredible to fathom, and on the other a thread that runs through current news out of Baton Rouge, St. Paul, and Dallas.

Inside the church basement, men in red polo shirts sit in a line of chairs like Deacons waiting on someone to approach an altar. And we've all come to them in search of some blessing, they must figure. There is a small long room with glass windows that reminds me of a concession stand. Inside is a wall of black and white historic images. One man in a red shirt is speaking to his small audience, his voice mute, glass between us. I think I know the story he is telling and move on, seeking out some grandeur of a sanctuary. One of the men directs me to the narrow stairwell of red carpet. He tells me to hold the rail. When he steps back to his other duties, I pause and take a photo of the contrast of bright walls and red steps. 'The way is narrow,' someone said, and I am surprised by this awkward design. Then it begins to register that this is not the main entrance, but a pilgrim's back way, an escape for children who had sat still as long as they could.

I arrive, with little transition, to the clearing of the sanctuary, a half-moon theater of walnut pews, red carpet, and bright glass. The interior is so familiar to me, having been baptized twice as a child, once from peer pressure and once from some longing that seemed to require a rite of passage or immersion. I stand at the back of the sanctuary, taking in the breadth of this grand canyon of a place.

I see the table carved with the phrase, "In Remembrance of Me" and then look up to see the black and white photograph of four girls projected high on the walls from some unseen source. The beautiful girls flank the gold organ pipes that line up like a card of new sewing needles. They served as bookends to the large-print-edition Bible on the pulpit, center stage.

Upon looking at the images, I felt something I had not felt before that moment–a weight. I can only describe this weight by stating the symptoms we read online of a heart attack. My back ached. My arm felt as if a clot would not allow its lift. I could not seem to cross my heart in any pledge, or genuflect. An arrhythmia formed inside of me.

While only fifteen minutes had passed since I stepped out of my car into this history lesson, I was unprepared for the schooling. During those fifteen minutes of white

privilege I had morphed this place into some duller iconic place called "the black church." The red carpet viewed as near cliché, until I recognized my sin of ignorance. This was "the" place. This was "that" place I had read about but never mapped, or considered a place for pilgrimage. This had been "the past."

Everyone in July of 2016 will look back on this hot summer with some perspective we do not now know. Two weeks ago many of us did not skip a beat at life. Yet this week many of us have written President Obama's prepared words from a memorial service into our journal. His reflective voice a bridge between those who write on their wall that "Jesus died for everyone," meaning not just any one, and those whose invisible rosary holds each beatitude like a bead if not a pearl. They mumble "blessed are the poor in spirit" and have their doubts.

I no longer attend the Baptist church where I grew up, where my Aunt taught Sunday School with felt boards and images. I have a string of Baptist perfect attendance medals in a cotton-lined box that speaks more to her faithfulness than mine. For many years, I've come to find sanctuary in the Episcopal Church, with its weekly breaking of the bread and shared cup. A few years ago, I became official–confirmed. But the Baptist Church had laid a cornerstone for me, one that I sometimes had met with a chisel in my hand and a desire to reform.

At 16th Street Baptist Church I took a seat in a pew mid-way down. It came with no kneeling hinge or Book of Common Prayer. At my seated knees was a shelf where the white cover of The Baptist Hymnal leaned toward me with gravity. It was facing me along with a Bible, the same translation awarded to me in a Primary Department with my maiden name inside in calligraphy in 1966. Beside the bookshelf was a smaller ledge with seven or so round, die-cut, empty holes to hold the separate glass communion cups each quarter. I had not seen that artifact in years. You could say "separate cups" was something preached to me growing up in the South in the 1960s, even as "desegregation was a spelling word where most of us transposed letters in my public school. We now know spelling should not even be a separate subject, but learned within a whole, a context, a reading that requires we bring our full selves to any text.

A woman in camouflage pants and tank top wrestled a vacuum cleaner and a snake of chord, while I sat quietly in my pew. My presence did not startle her or slow her pace. She was expecting me. She went about her work. The static of the machine was a stirring sound that was comforting. I did not want to particularly be alone in a large empty room with pink carnations in the altar vase arranged like a funeral spray. Her work reminded me that this is an active church with services end of week, not a museum. Her work provided an echo to the radio static I had found all the way from Fort Payne to Birmingham. I was traveling between stations.

Before leaving, I want to walk up to the altar, to see the red ribbon in the book. I find instead a crumpled white linen handkerchief to the left, a cut-glass stemmed goblet for water to serve the preacher's voice. Together, the three objects reminded me of the water cycles we drew in elementary school when I was the age of four young girls named Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, and Denise McNair. I had to refer to the church brochure to write those names, and not misspell them, the way I once did 'desegregation.' Their four names were never celebrity.

I linger a few moments in the church and take my leave. As I pass back through the basement, I pause at a glass museum cabinet that can barely contain the replica of a slave ship. Inside the boat, hundreds of small bodies made of clay line the floor in perfect symmetry, like communion cups and unopened books. In another section of the hull, the artist had depicted a huddle of contorted bodies and I look away, then step away. I cannot bear the weight and feel a little dizzy. On another table display was a large red oil lamp and I remember my grandmother had one just like it for emergencies that rarely came our way. It stood alone, without a mate, like a widow. It stood on the table in front of a silk banner printed with a portrait of MLK.

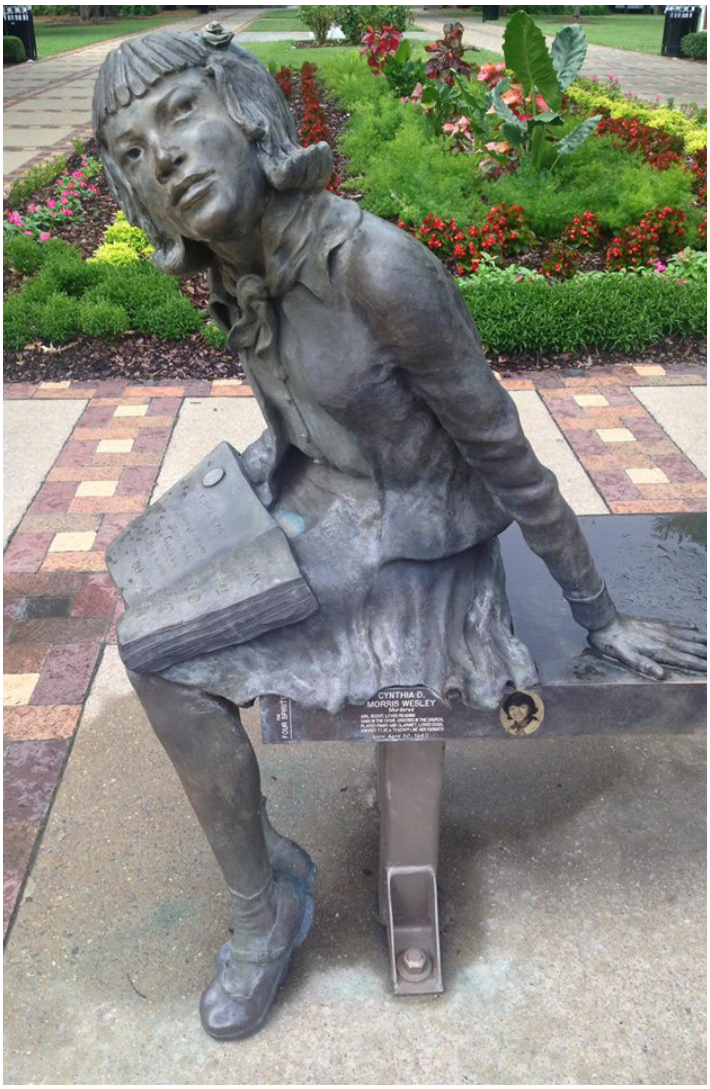
A Deacon wearing a red polo stepped into the glass room to talk with those listening. Those photos would have told me what I might witness if I had the will to listen. But I didn't and wanted to leave without taking such a communion, without offering a donation, without slipping a prayer into the box at the back of the sanctuary.

Outside the sun was shining. Perhaps it was also shining on Sunday, September 15, 1963 at 10:22 a.m. I walk at an angle to a city block that frames a circular path. In front of me are four girls on a bench forever posed in bronze. A fifth figure, a living black woman sits between two of the girls with her pocket book on her lap. I want to take her photo but she has moved before I even make the gesture, wanting to be polite. She offers me her seat. She has been expecting me, like the other woman vacuuming the church. I've since read that more than two million pilgrims have traveled to this park since the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute opened in 1992,

right across the street.

I take a photo of the four girls. The one perched on the end of the bench is leaning into the difficult words in her holy book. Two other girls balance her on the other end of the see-saw-like scene. One has slipped off her tight Mary Janes, and the pair of shoes sit just below her, casually, as if we could reach down and pick them up or help adjust the buckles. One shoe holds a puddle of recent rain. The size 6x shoes offers a sparrow a drink, and clouds and a canopy of trees are mirrored there–a universe. The barefoot girl is tying the sash of her best friend, and her long locks remind me of Cinderella from a storybook. Close by, the fourth girl is forever animated in a dance with doves. The doves break the reality and move me to metaphor, and metaphor is sometimes distancing.

I follow the circular path to the next vignette. Two children pose defiant. This is a study in contrast. 'I ain't afraid of your jail' is interpreted by a pedestal plaque titled, The Childrens' Crusade. My first thought reading the title had nothing to do with violence, because I have had the privilege of lingering in a different world. As children, we collected coins in small, plastic church banks for someone named Lottie Moon in China. My civic engagement ended there. My thoughts then move to the felt boards where a boy with a slingshot slays the giant and grows up to become a king, because it paid more than poetry. I think of Bible Sword Drills we were taught to stay sharp, where we competed on stage to be the first to find scripture verses in a book the size of a dictionary. I did not, in my white privilege, imagine the connotations of a water hose that stripped the bark off trees and shredded a girl's pleated skirt. I did not imagine the Public Safety Commissioner rounding up children in school buses for the jail. I did not fear any dog, except one that a neighbor had made mean as an extension of his own bitterness.



Photography| Laurie Vaughen

In the park, a man pushes his bicycle slowly toward me, his right arm in a sling and swollen slightly. He has lost all symmetry, what with his wound, and the bicycle he is guiding by hand like a child. He is coming to talk to me, as if he has been expecting me. He becomes my docent. 'Did you read this?' he asks. I had not read past the title, being a poor student of history, like many. I make my confession.

'I lived just down the street,' he says with an authority, as he points to a place he alone can still see. He continues with his story. 'I was six. It shook our house. It made this sound...' he said and continued into a contortion of vocal sound effects. The 'it' of course is the white elephant in every room, a bombing by the Ku Klux Klan. He moves his left hand from the plaque to reveal a phone number tourists can call for more information, if we want to hear a story. 'Go ahead, call the number and listen,' he says. I type in the number on my iPhone and a serious voice begins telling me a story, but, then so is the man standing right in front of me.

My new friend continues to share with me and asks me where I'm from. He shows me his sore arm and says he has two metal screws holding it together. He is nearly a sculpture. He assures me that life is better than it was. His story turns back quickly to the street where we are standing.

'You have to realize, there were houses all around here, all the way down the street.' He nearly says 'my' street but hesitates. He has a larger story than his to tell.

"Imagine school buses lining up to arrest children. I'm talking boys and girls–to take them to the jail.' His good strong arm overcompensates for his other one–and my ignorance–and moves again to the interpreter's offering, to the photo on the plaque of a boy looking back at us

through chain link fence. A crowd of other classmates are shoved up against the child in the photograph. There is no recess.

I never listened to the recorded story from the plaque, but chose instead one I could not fact check, but only internalize. My docent instructs me to turn around, away from the two defiant children that tower over both of us. He shows me a symmetry I had missed completely, cropping the artist's intent. There is a bookend sculpture standing like a window with bars across the sidewalk from the two children who aren't afraid. 'Look up,' he said and points to a different kind of Letters from a Birmingham Jail than I had processed in college. The letters for 'D E S E G R E G A T I O N' were written upside down on the jail wall because the young foot soldiers knew they were marching in a world that was not accurately reflecting their inalienable rights. For these young foot soldiers in the Children's Crusade of 1965, the world was upside down.

The Children's Crusade was not a part of history I had come to know, not a story retold to me. Instead my public elementary school took us on field trips in the other direction. I went many, many times to the Hermitage home of Andrew Jackson in Nashville, and came away with an empty lunch sack. I learned that Jackson owned several horse hair couches that were seen but kept out of reach to us. I remember stopping at Stuckey's on the way for a pecan log and a Coke. I remember taking in landscape through the school bus window that proved that change is slow. There were no signs that interpreted Andrew Jackson's full story at his white house. The Trail of Tears had not yet been labeled. Somewhere I still have a postcard featuring a portrait of Jackson and another of his wife Rachel, thinking even then about hinges, book spines, and symmetry. I've kept them some thirty years to remind me that a postcard souvenir is something cropped, something the visitor's bureau wants us to see.

Somehow, even until this week, I had not sorted out the history of police dogs and fire hoses used to deter protesters in the 1960s. Seems I had morphed all scenes into one event somewhere far away. I never really knew how seminal Birmingham's youth were to the Civil Rights movement. Yet, it happened this way, a mere two hour school bus ride away, and in the opposite direction from Old Hickory. The year 1965 was before I started first grade.

I had read and written about Letter from a Birmingham Jail, that famous letter MLK penned on April 16, 1965. I never knew exactly why he found himself there,

Photography| Laurie Vaughen

satisfied with abstract answers. Even Reverend King gets cropped and framed as some solitary lonely statue, some lonely man out on a back balcony. In Birmingham, he stands in the center of the park on a pedestal that no one can sit down beside, unlike the scene with the four young girls who were also victims of a hate crime. MLK was in Birmingham that spring of 1965 training families and children in the steps of civil disobedience, in working as a group, lifting their voice to sing, in knowing that segregation is something to overcome. And maybe someday we will.

The Children's Crusade was a victory for Birmingham's Civil Rights leaders in May of 1965. From May 2 to May 10, the world watched as groups of youth and their leaders pressured the Mayor and other elected officials to desegregate the city. During those nine days, hundreds of children were jailed and held in makeshift detention centers, injured by an assault of batons, pressure wash, and dog bites. A circuit court made protest and picketing illegal and justified arrests. After each arrest, however, other groups of youth stepped up, because thousands of black youth were trained in nonviolent civil disobedience in church basements and fellowship halls. The youth proved to be good students of the future.

The images of the police directing water hoses like assault weapons 'went viral,' along with the photographs of police dogs on a short leash gnashing their teeth. I saw these images in the abstract isolation of a page.

The world was watching the democratic experiment of America. That was May of 1965 and the month offered itself up to the alliteration of 'momentum' and 'movement.'

But the other side of the railroad yard had its own movement, too. Their training program was also held in church basements and among certain deacons. The KKK was mobilizing in Birmingham. By September of 1965, they were crossing lines of civilized society like any other terrorist organization. They planted an arsenal of bombs and terror in a room that held the same stack of Bibles as theirs. Their bomb exploded, killing the four young girls and injuring at least twenty others. Terror requires a long recovery, I am reminded as I listen to a six year old's story from the point of view of a middle-aged man.

My docent owns this story. I realize he is using his city's legacy of heavy iron to erect a storyboard, just as the sculptor James Drake. I read the upside down letters below a window of a jail only because a man from Birmingham pointed this out for me. My docent is likely homeless, meaning life is a mobility only his balance and two wheels allow. But here, in this story, he is at home. He repeats his narrative for emphasis: "I was six and I felt my house shake and it made this sound heard all around."

We all stay close to our stories, tending them like fires. Perhaps the closer we can get to someone else's story the better. Years ago this Baptist boy was in Birmingham sipping from a small cup and turning his hymnal to "Onward Christian Soldiers." The song surely conjured up an entirely different set of connotations in his imagination than mine in rural white Tennessee. I write this essay perhaps to dwell a bit longer, to linger closer to his story and his fire. I have been so cold.

I continue along the circle in the park, a place of great clarity that quickly pulls you to the center of all things, not a normal labyrinth with mysteries. The path in Kelly Ingram Park covers four acres and five decades. It is named Freedom Walk and is situated directly in front of the Civil Rights Institute that opened in 1992. The Institute's mission is to recognize Birmingham's place as the "cornerstone" of the Civil Rights Movement and its citizens instrumental in the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The circle of the freedom walk is endless. Halfway along my emotional first orbit, I come across an elderly couple sitting on a bench relaxing near sculptures that interpret the water hoses and agitated police dogs. The couple smiles as I circle closer to them, and, as we say in the South, I "speak." The older man with a cane becomes my second exit. 'I was a foot soldier,' he says like a decorated Veteran. I nod in recognition of the new story we can share.

The Freedom Walk in Birmingham offers the same imagery of the Cherokee sacred symbol, a circle that never ends. Every building has a story and every park. Every community, every city block, and basement. The public realm is a place with many utilities. The most important one is becoming a safe place where the docents of history pass along what they have witnessed, what they had the courage to change.

Too Soon, Zaevion

Marilyn Kallet

A fifteen-year old should be
Dreaming about prom,
Whom to invite,

About football,
Number 24, sprinting
To the end line,

About classes,
Colleges,
Anything.

But Zaevian Dobson
Hurled his strong
Young body

In the way of bullets.
His body was too human
To shatter metal.

His body proved
Strong enough to stop bullets
From killing two friends,

Young women who will
Embody
His memory.

Maybe they will call
A son
Zaevion, and tell him,
"You are named for
a man who was not too young
to do the right thing. A hero."

"Yes, yes, we know,"
teens will sigh.
President Obama invoked him,

The young man who
Sacrificed himself
Without a breath of doubt.

But I am thinking now of Mrs. Dobson,
His mother, who taught him
To think first

Of others,
Thinking of the ache,
The emptiness,

Her son
Shattered by cold metal
Fired from the hands

Of twenty-somethings:
"barrage of bullets"
"senseless shooting spree"—
As if there could be
A meaningful shooting
spree—
Zaevion is a beautiful name,
Now more beautiful,
His mother's consolation.
A Tenth Grader,
He should have been
Studying biology

And playing ball.
He should still be
Home with family.
Aren't I a mother too?
So I lay my heart on the page
For Mrs. Dobson.

I want to kill the bullet that
Killed your son, Zenobia.
Want to stop this madness.

Would I throw myself in the way?
I am a professor,
But Zae, you are my teacher now.

Photography| Joannah Gallagher

JAKE IRWIN

Tire Iron

Me and two buddies, James and Jonathan, piled into my Chevy Cobalt and began our hour-long adventure back to Anderson County. Riding shotgun, James unzipped his hoody, promoting his classic rock band of the day, while Jonathan folded his arms across his Star Wars t-shirt, propped his Converse clad feet across the backseat, and made himself at home. We were on our way back from watching some friends of ours perform in a marching band competition in Seymore, Tennessee. The three of us had just graduated high school, and our trip to see them was one of those intermediary moments between moving on and wanting to relive the memories of when we had marched in the same competition the year before.

Little did I know new memories were about to be made.

Minorly traumatizing memories.

I didn't think twice about volunteering to drive earlier that day. Jonathan was in town from Lee University for the weekend, and we were about to see a host of other friends we hadn't seen much of since graduating. As far as I was concerned, it wasn't going to be a good day—it was going to be a great one. I didn't even think about the drive home. If I had, I would've persuaded one of them to take their cars.

I was eighteen and still in the infant stages of my driving experience and knowledge of downtown Knoxville. Unfortunately, in order to get home, I had to drive right through the heart of Knoxville. At night.

With all of its signs, jaywalkers, and one-way streets, it is no different than any other city, but like any good teenaged country boy, I had only driven through it a couple times in my life, so to me it might as well have been New York. Those few times when I had driven through it had been during the day with the help of my dad's navigational skills. In fact, the one time I had done it on my own

Photography| Kyle Macillop

ended with me stopped at a red light under a bridge, completely lost in a sketchy part of town.

So needless to say, I used my GPS.

I mounted that treacherous contraption onto my dashboard and listened to an Australian woman's voice navigate me across the Tennessee River into a sea of light and danger. As we crossed the Henley Street Bridge, my friends and I chatted away. We discussed important issues like movies and videogames. Anything but the piece of modern technology that was plotting against us.

We were blissfully unaware of my GPS's brewing scheme as we entered the traffic mess that is downtown Knoxville. I didn't know where the ramp to get onto I-75 was, but the GPS map told me we had less than a mile before the next turn. So I went with the motions of letting my foot off the clutch and flowing with the traffic from red light to red light.

I didn't bother trying to navigate through the city myself. It's an easy enough thing to do if you follow the signs, but that night there was so much going on around me, from bicyclists to cars switching lanes, that I kept to the right and did what every good millennial does—I trusted technology. After all, weren't computers smarter than people?

Well, if they are, mine wasn't.

The picture on the GPS said the next turn was in three tenths of a mile. Had I used my eyes and looked up, I would have seen a sign over a lane that more or less reads, "I-275 to I-75 North toward Lexington." However, instead of going straight through the intersection toward this sign, I listened to a robot.

"Turn right," the GPS said.

It surprised me, but I snapped the wheel to the right and started up a blind hill that was two lanes wide.

A pickup truck horn blared at me.

I jumped in surprise and happened to look at the road as I drove over a thick white arrow pointing in the opposite direction than the way I was going. The GPS had sent me up a one-way street.

Now the street was wide enough that the smart thing to do would have been to pull over into a parking space along the curb and make a U-turn. Naturally, that's the exact opposite of what I did. I kept thinking a semi-truck would fly over the hill and plow into us head on.

So I floored it in first gear.

Next to me, James freaked out and braced himself against the dashboard while Jonathan, who had wrecked his truck a year or two before, remained calm as if to say, "Eh…I've done worse."

My engine roared at me to shift gears, but I'd forgotten that I was driving a manual. The first road I came to, I yanked the steering wheel to the right. My tires slammed into the curb, but I kept going. For all I knew, I had just turned onto another one-way street, but at least I could see straight ahead. I needed a place to pull over and check the damage the curb had done.

There was an abandoned parking lot about fifty yards away. I pulled into it, not sure where we were downtown and I didn't care. I pounded my fist into the steering wheel and yelled. I still lived at home, and I was terrified at what my parents were going to say.

"It's okay," one of my friends probably said, but I was too worked up to remember.

I stormed out of my car, slamming the door shut behind me and marched around to the passenger side to check out the damage.

It could have been worse, but none of us knew what to make of it. Both the front and back tires on that side had chunks missing and the rear hubcap was chipped. We couldn't hear any air rushing out of them, which was good, but it was dark and we couldn't tell if there was any more damage.

I sighed and called my dad to tell him what happened. He took it well. His tone implied that there wasn't anything that could be done to undo it, so it was best to move forward. He suggested that we change the rear tire since it had the most damage and see if it was drivable.

While I was on the phone, James and Jonathan went

to look at the curb that I hit. When they came back, James said, "Dude, you're lucky you still have tires." And Jonathan said, "How are your shocks not broken?"

I grunted. Those were just the words I needed to hear to cheer me up.

"We need to change the tire," I said.

They nodded and that became our goal. But here's the thing about Chevy Cobalts that I didn't know at the time. Unlike every other car under creation, whoever designed the carjack for the Cobalt also built the tire iron into it. Not only that, but they proceeded to do it in such a way that it all looks like one piece.

In short, I concluded that the car did not have a tire iron. A conclusion that James, who loves cars, refused accept. He continued searching the trunk while I got out the manual, and Jonathan tried to use the plyers on his Leatherman tool to unscrew the hubcaps. It was a creative, if not useless, attempt to make progress.

As I flicked through the pages, a man approached us. I gave him a stink eye him from the other side of the car, and Jonathan straightened. Meanwhile James was defenseless with half his body inside the Cobalt trunk.

"I just got out of the jail," he said. "You all got any cigarettes?"

Jonathan, who had remained calm throughout my driving incident, yelled, "Nope. Nope. We ain't got nothing you need."

Yep. Turns out that I had chosen to pull over to fix my car only a few blocks away from the city jail. Thankfully, the man didn't press the issue and continued on his way.

Jonathan and I exchanged glances. Then James stopped digging around the trunk and finally declared the search pointless. He couldn't believe that a car dealership would sell a car without a tire iron. For what it's worth, the manual does explain how to disassemble the jack to get the tire iron. I learned that years later in the safety of my own driveway. But right then, the former inmate had spooked us, and I thought the tires could hold air long enough to get out of town.

We jumped back in the car and eventually found our way to the interstate, but the whole drive home had me watching the electric air pressure gage in the dash. The pressure increased as we sped down the interstate. I thought that was a good thing, except James worried it might mean the tires were about to blow. If that is what it means, then we never found out. I am happy to say we made it back to their cars, and I returned home with a story to share.

Photography| Kyle Mackillop

DRAKE FARMER

"Something *Magical*": A Glimmer of Hope for the American Chestnut

More than a century ago, the American chestnut was decimated by a fungus. A group of scientists, volunteers, and university biology, geology, and environmental science departments are fighting to bring it back. But it will take a lot longer to restore the American chestnut to its place in the Appalachian forest than it did to destroy it.

If you live in the southern or eastern United States, take a moment to imagine the forest nearest you. Fill in, among the oaks, hickorys, and pines, just one tree: the American chestnut, with it's slender saw-toothed leaves and long, yellow catkins. It's a staggering image. Scientists estimate that as recently as a century ago, one in four trees in eastern deciduous forests was an American chestnut (scientific name castanea dentata). But now, the tall, old-growth American chestnuts that once dominated the forests exist as little more than a scraggly shrub, if they are to be found at all. Sadly, this ecological misfortune is not just isolated to that patch of deciduous forest along the Tennessee-North Carolina Border.

I didn't know about the plight of the American chestnut when I first visited the Max Patch Backcross Orchard. The orchard is a direct-seed test site nestled in the rolling hills of the Pisgah National Forest. I might have never known about the efforts to revive the lost American chestnut had my fiancé, Chelsea, not gone to plant American chestnut saplings with her dendrology class at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. As an English graduate student, the narrative of scientists fighting to revive a lost tree was a distant one reserved for compelling pieces on NPR. But on that warm, July day, I was a small part of that narrative. As we drove through the national forest I pictured what it would look like full of chestnut trees; I was about to see nearly one hundred and fifty.

By some accounts, there were once about twenty genetically diverse types of American chestnut in the south, according to Dr. Hill Craddock of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Craddock attributes this, in part, to the South's hospitality towards organic life during periods

Photography| Lori Kincaid

of glacial maxima. When vast sheets of ice covered the earth, organic life either died off or moved south. The south offered organic life, the American chestnut included, what's known to biologists as ice age refugia–tiny geographical pockets conducive to life during periods of otherwise inhospitable climate conditions. In the case of the American chestnut, the trees bred among themselves in these refugia until the ice sheet melted, at which point they were able to spread, to rejoin and breed with other pockets of trees. Because of this, Craddock says, "it may be that chestnut trees are adapted to the local soils and climates [of the American south], as well as variations in those soils, climates, and pests." If Craddock is correct, and the refugia helped preserve the American chestnut, the process also created a trove of biological diversity. Within the native range of the American chestnut, genetic diversity among the trees and symbiotic relationships with wildlife and flora flourished. Further, the bulk of the tree's range was rural and mountainous, and so the American chestnut not only offered important biological contributions to the surrounding forests, but economic and cultural stability, as well.

* * *

As we nosed our car through the slot left open by a steel gate guarding the Max Patch Backcross Orchard, I knew I was witnessing something spectacular. I'd never before seen an American chestnut, and yet, here they were: hundreds of them planted in tidy rows along a gently sloping hillside. The Great Smoky Mountains loomed large in the distance, to the south. At full maturity, an American chestnut towers above the forest floor, reaching nearly one hundred feet in height; its trunk can expand to nearly five feet in diameter. The saplings at the Max Patch Backcross Orchard were hardly seven feet tall. Even the smallest hand could easily wrap around their stems.

As we walked through tidy rows of chestnut saplings, I asked Chelsea about the fate of these trees. Would this orchard serve as a sanctuary for the trees? Would Craddock and his students come back, year after year, to mark the growth of each tree?

"All words about the American Chesnut are now but an elegy for it"
- Donald Culrose Peattie

"These are test trees," Chelsea tells me, pinching a leaf between her index finger and thumb. "When they are a little older, they'll be intentionally inoculated with blight. The survivors will be backcrossed with other blight resistant plants and then the whole process will start over." The idea is quite poetic: some trees must die for the greater cause of saving the species.

John Webb and Lori Kincaid own the Max Patch orchard property. They donated a part of their pastoral land to contribute to the revival of the American chestnut, to science. Their generosity also offered a touch of magic. In a far corner of their land stands a mature, native chestnut tree. And it still–mysteriously–flowers. After we'd seen the orchard, we drove to their house a few hundred feet away. Almost as soon as we arrived, at John and Lori's insistence, Chelsea and I found ourselves trudging up the hill at the far end of their property. We passed rows of wildflowers and a grist of bees, hard at work, to see the magic, flowering chestnut. I would have walked right past it had Chelsea not stopped me. I had only that day seen my first chestnut tree, and I was certainly no expert in identifying them. I turned and was again presented with a new sight: my second American chestnut tree. A cluster of thin, yellow chestnut catkins, a little less than a foot long, dangled a few feet above my head.

* * *

Rural appalachian communities relied on the resources provided by the American chestnut. Near Newport, Tennessee, before the the railroad came to the area in the 1880s and while the forests were still teeming with the American chestnut, "free-ranging hogs, turkeys and cattle would fatten on chestnuts in the fall before being driven, on foot, along the French Broad River," says John Webb. John and his wife Lori are deeply rooted in the narratives of the local community. They are deeply invested in the fate of the American chestnut. John wrote me to explain a little about the importance of the American Chestnut in his area: "The timber from the American chestnut was easy to saw or split and was durable, and many local structures and split-rail fences were made of chestnut and much

lumber was sawn for distant markets. Newport, Tennessee was also the site of a of a large tannery, and chestnut, loaded with tannic acid, yielded wood ideal for tanning animal hides." Even now, locals can still find sound American chestnut logs cut down during the rapid spread of blight, half-buried in the forest floor. If the American chestnut was once considered an economic and ecological panacea in it's Appalachian range, by 1904 that had all changed.

The botanist Donald Culross Peattie wrote this about the American chestnut: "All words about the American chestnut are not but an elegy for it." Cryphonectria parasitica–commonly called chestnut blight– is a foreign fungal pathogen that slashed its way through the extant American chestnut population of the southeastern U.S. The signs of blight are ominous, and its impact vicious: orange cankers form on the bark of infected trees, and within a short period of time, the once-towering chestnut, unable to slough off the fungus, withers from the canopy.

Blight dealt such a heavy blow to the American chestnut, so quickly, that many scientists, including Peattie, lamented the loss of the once-prominent hardwood before it was completely reduced to its current, sparse state. In the century that's passed since Peattie's mournful entry, the pendulum has begun to swing from pessimism, towards optimism. Today, scientists, along with volunteers, universities, and organizations such as The American Chestnut Foundation are diligently working to restore the American chestnut to its native range.

"We've spent almost one hundred years bringing genes from blight resistant Asian species into the American species," Craddock tells me at one of our interviews. While Craddock is a professor of biology at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, he is also a member of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF). "We've designed the program in a way that will conserve the genetic diversity of the American species. Particularly in the Southeast, where [there is] high biological diversity, we try to capture as much of that diversity as we can in blight-resistant hybrids before they disappear forever."

Orchards such as the one near Max Patch are scattered across the eastern U.S. and are a major part of the revitalization process. Most of them are branches of The American Chestnut Foundation, an organization that is dedicated to developing a blight-resistant American chestnut. At these test orchards, those involved with the restoration of the American chestnut are presented with a haven in which to experiment. The idea is to advance

Photography| Lori Kincaid

the hybrid trees from one generation to the next, selecting for American characteristics. The result is a tree that carries the physical characteristics of the American chestnut, yet are blight resistant.

The trees at a test orchard are specific to that region. "We setup this program thirty years ago in chapters where each state will be breeding for local adaptation," says Craddock. "The idea is that, in Maine they're breeding for Maine chestnuts; in Pennsylvania they're breeding for Pennsylvania chestnuts; in Tennessee, we're breeding for Tennessee chestnuts." This approach retains a high level of genetic diversity among the trees. Craddock, among others, fears a reality in which there is only one type of American chestnut in the South. He much prefers to imagine a future in which there are numerous varieties.

About two hundred and fifteen new chestnuts have been planted at the Max Patch orchard since the original trees. While these new trees are also backcrossed, they differ slightly from the others: they have as their mother a specific tree from the property they are planted on. The presence of a native chestnut at the Max Patch test orchard is remarkable. More mystical is the fact that the tree is infected with the chestnut blight and still flowers.

* * *

John tells the story like this: while out walking one summer, about ten years ago, he discovered what he thought was an American chestnut in bloom hanging over the fence between his property and the neighbors'. Amazed, and in disbelief, he rushed back to tell Lori. Delighted as they were, the two weren't sure it was a native tree. To make sure, Lori, who had recently met some folks affiliated with TACF, reached out to Ross and Elberta Broadway of Ten Mile, Tennessee. They, along volunteers from with the Tennessee chapter of TACF, offered to come look at the tree and positively identified it as an American chestnut. Upon discovering that this magic tree was, in fact, a native, mature American Chestnut, the tree's location was reported to Craddock. Along with his wife, son and a group of students, Craddock came to John and Lori's property and began propagation of the tree.

"I'll drive 200 miles to go see a blooming chestnut tree," Craddock tells me as we sip beer in a local brewery in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Craddock, donning wire-rimmed glasses and a fleece vest with the American Chestnut Foundation logo embroidered on the chest, tells me of the tree on John and Lori's property. I ask him what, besides the fact that the tree near Max Patch flowers, makes it so unique? His eyes light up behind his glasses. "Something magical," he says, sipping his beer. American chestnuts vary in their susceptibility to various diseases, including blight. Craddock has discovered that while the the tree at John and Lori's is infected with blight, it possesses a different, hypovirulent strain of the fungus that allows it to continue to flower. The discovery is a breakthrough. "The virus keeps the fungus from killing the tree," he continues. "It's a naked, double-stranded RNA. So, it doesn't have a protein coat and it doesn't spread through the air. Fungi, when they grow, fuse their bodies together, so it's transmitted cytoplasmically." This sounds like great news for the revitalization and future survival of the American chestnut. But because the magic Max Patch tree is isolated it can't produce chestnuts.

A recent development in chestnut research has added somewhat of a curveball to the conversation. Genetically engineered American chestnuts, modified with a wheat gene that combats the blight fungus by producing oxalate oxidase, has come on the scene. The modified gene effectively disarms the blight, rendering it ineffective and allows the tree to continue to grow and flower. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Craddock explains that, while there are obvious benefits, such as blight-resistant trees–what traditional and nontraditional plant breeders alike have been working towards for nearly one hundred years–there are some downsides.

"If we cross every chestnut tree we have with one genetically modified chestnut, every chestnut in the future population will have that same parent," Craddock tells me. "Which is putting all your eggs in one basket. We have to be very careful about how we move those genes, those oxalate oxidase genes, into the population. That's why the Max Patch trees are very important, and this is one argument for not killing them," Craddock says. "The game has changed: four years ago, we didn't know that we would have this new [genetically modified] tool. The plan was to infect [all of the saplings at Max Patch]with blight and kill off the susceptible trees. Now their value may be more as a reservoir of genetic diversity."

Craddock invited me to stop by his greenhouse the following Thursday to see how everything works on the back-end of the hybridization process. "There's

some Carolina Wrens that have made a nest in that cardboard box, over there," Craddock says to me, as he plants seeds from a Chinese cultivar of chestnut into small, plastic containers. Craddock's greenhouse is divided into three sections. Each table is lined with chestnut trees at various stages of maturation. The youngest are just seedlings. Craddock makes it a point to tell me that seeds are still trees. More interesting, perhaps, is the layout of the greenhouse. To the left are all the trees set aside for conservation purposes: these trees are traditionally backcrossed, local Tennessee adaptations of American chestnuts, like some of the trees planted at Max Patch Orchard. The middle rows are dedicated to genetic experimentation; here is where Craddock and his graduate students get to attempt long-shot projects. On the far right side, near where the Carolina Wrens made their nest, is a section dedicated to application. Here is where projects, like one in which a graduate student traveled to Alabama to propagate a native tree, live.

Craddock's greenhouse assures me that, behind the scenes and out of sight, folks are working hard to restore a unique component to a thriving Appalachian hardwood forest.

"Despite all of our best effort, we haven't really made a drop in the bucket yet," Craddock says. "The prognosis is good, but from a population point of view we're down to one percent of what the population was pre-blight. And it's still dwindling. The reservoir of biological diversity is the forest. The chestnut habitat is diminishing, forests are being cleared for agriculture and urban sprawl, and we're changing the way we manage the forests. The chestnuts that are there are under constant stress."

The American Chestnut Foundation has five and ten-year strategic plans. It also has twenty-five, fifty, and one hundred-year strategic plans.

"When we look at the forest one hundred years from now, the trees at max patch might be one hundred years old," says Craddock. "They could be big and producing. But it's not a chestnut forest. It's one orchard. To restore a chestnut forest is going to take many centuries. A lot longer than it took to destroy it."

I've seen one orchard and a greenhouse filled with chestnuts. Even if Craddock's outlook is modestly optimistic, it's the tenacity he and those like him share that give me hope. It might not be a drop in the bucket yet, but it's a step in the right direction. Without intervention, the American chestnut might become extinct. Hope for the return of the American chestnut lies with the people working hard to save it, with the people willing to donate their land, and with a little magic.

Photography| Joannah Gallagher